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TAGS: PTER FR EAIR KFLU CVIS

SUBJECT: FRANCE; DHS SECRETARY CHERTOFF'S JAN. 24  
DISCUSSIONS ON C/T, AVIAN FLU, BIOMETRIC PASSPORTS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CRAIG STAPLETON FOR REASONS 1.4 (A) AND (D)

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SUMMARY  
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¶11. (SBU) Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff held meetings in Paris January 24 to discuss preparations for a potential avian flu pandemic, Franco-American cooperation on C/T and aviation security, and specific issues related to biometric passports and the Container Security Initiative (CSI). He met with an interministerial delegation of French officials at the General Secretariat for National Defense (SGDN), and held a separate meeting with the Director of France's FBI-equivalent Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire (DST). He engaged leading French opinion-makers in a discussion of U.S. homeland security policy over lunch, and discussed both his trip and concerns about France's failure to produce biometric passports with the press. A meeting with Interior Minister Nicholas Sarkozy will be reported septel.

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¶12. (SBU) Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff met with Francis Delon, Director General of the Prime Minister's office for defense policy coordination (SGDN) in Paris January 24. Delon was accompanied by Vice-Admiral Scott de Martinville (SGDN); Didier Houssin, Interministerial Delegate for Avian Flu; Michel Wachenheim, Director General of Civil Aviation; Frederic Mondoloni, Deputy Diplomatic Advisor, Prime Minister's Office; David Martinon, Diplomatic Advisor, MOI; Pierre Thenard, Deputy-Director for Security, MFA; Prefect Bernard Boube, SGDN; Eric Lebedel, SGDN; General Bernard Salvignol, SGDN; Captain Jean-Louis Vichot, SGDN; Benedicte Suzan, SGDN; and Jean-Philippe Grelot, SGDN. Secretary Chertoff was accompanied by Ambassador Craig Stapleton; Deputy Chief of Mission Karl Hofmann; DHS A/S for Public Affairs Brian Besancenay; DHS Deputy Chief of Staff Chad Beaudreux; DHS Office of International Affairs Director for European and Multilateral Affairs Dennis Sequeira; Embassy Paris DOJ Representative Kenneth Harris; Embassy Paris DHS Representative Deirdre Mahon; Embassy Paris TSA Representative Nouri Larbi; Poloff Peter Kujawinski; and Econoff (notetaker).

13. (SBU) SG Delon began by explaining SGDN's role in coordination and planning for avian flu. Primary responsibility lay with Interministerial Delegate Didier Houssin. Houssin outlined the main elements of France's approach, especially its plan to stockpile enough drugs and masks to treat virtually all of France's 60 million people: they expected to have 40 million treatments by 2007, including 33 million anti-virals. The plan called also called for stockpiling 40 million doses of vaccine, and 50 million professional face-masks alongside tens of millions of surgical masks. Delon noted that a key uncertainty was the eventual availability of an avian flu vaccine. France wanted to invite the US to attend a national exercise to be held in France in co-operation with the UN and WHO March 16. Secretary Chertoff said the U.S. would be interested in

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sending an observer.

14. (SBU) Secretary Chertoff noted the similarity of the U.S. approach: DHS was involved because of the significant non-medical dimensions to an avian flu pandemic, including maintenance of power supplies, food and water supplies, and border control. The latter would need to be coordinated internationally. Secretary Chertoff said key questions were how to prioritize limited drug supplies, how to do border screening, how to inform the public and businesses, and how to provide significant medical surge capacity.

15. (SBU) Delon said France was grappling with many of the same issues. They would have to coordinate border closings internationally, particularly with other EU countries, and were looking at providing treatment at home to ease the strain on medical facilities. Didier Hossein noted two key issues for French planners: whether to close schools, and

what to do about public transportation. Much would depend on the lethality of a virus. They believed they would have to close schools. Secretary Chertoff noted that the USG did not control schools as in France, and that it would be easier for it to order closure than to ensure that they stayed open. Parents and local school boards would ultimately decide make this decision. We were looking at options for local closures, if outbreaks were limited. The U.S. had not yet reached a conclusion on public transportation. Hurricane Katrina had shown however, that power and petrol supplies were crucial to U.S. infrastructure, and we would have to make decision about shutting down infrastructure very cautiously. The U.S. would share its plan with France once it was finalized.

16. (SBU) Francis Delon said that the GOF had made a decision in June to make planning for a potential avian flu outbreak public. He said that if an outbreak occurred, government advice needed to be believed to be effective. It was important to establish public confidence in it now. Secretary Chertoff said he totally agreed, and A/S Besancenay

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noted the importance of international coordination of communication strategies: in the internet age, different messages coming from opposite sides of the Atlantic could easily create doubts about their validity. Francis Delon concluded that there was a basic consensus on strategy, and Secretary Chertoff urged that both sides keep in touch as

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planning for avian flu progressed.

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SGDN: FRANCE,S C/T WHITE PAPER

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17. (C) Delon raised France's "white paper" on terrorism, drafting of which the SGDN is spearheading. The white paper, said Delon, will most likely be finalized and made public in

February. It seeks to define the terrorist threat, to evaluate the utility of present counterterrorist strategies, and to propose medium to long-term strategies. The main threat, said Delon, is al Qaida and extremists from the Muslim world: "radical Islamist terrorism." It is expected to be long-term, to last at least for a generation. The extremists, ideology is archaic, said Delon, although their means to spread their ideology are very modern. They hate the system of globalization but nonetheless use it to fight. These extremists are not combatants and France is not at war, said Delon. The GOF wants to avoid legitimizing their cause by equating it with other, more conventional wars.

¶18. (C) In order to fight this strategic threat, the white paper will focus on the importance of better intelligence, strengthening the government's capacity to protect infrastructure, strengthening crisis planning, and eliciting the cooperation and confidence of the public. The white paper is meant to be public, said Delon, in order to inform the public of the threat to French society. Secretary Chertoff agreed with the importance of these broad themes. He stressed that the U.S. was particularly concerned about terrorists procuring WMD. Any WMD attack would have a "transformative impact" on a society and its economy, said Chertoff. It was orders of magnitude higher than terrorist attacks using convention weapons.

¶19. (C) At the end of his presentation on the white paper, Delon noted that France had just approved new legislation to fight terrorism. This legislation would increase video surveillance in public places and in public transport; would give intelligence agencies increased access to government databases; and would toughen the sanctions involved in terrorism-related cases. Delon added that Iraq was a grave matter of concern to France, given that a number of French citizens had already been caught trying to reach Iraq to fight jihad. France feared that Iraq resembled previous conflicts in the Balkans, Chechnya and Afghanistan in their attraction and formation of would-be militants.

¶10. (C) Delon also mentioned two French proposals for cooperation on C/T related issues. One would have Prefect Boube lead an interministerial French delegation to the U.S. in March or April to discuss strategies and means of classifying NRBC threats to better focus collaboration between French and American laboratories developing technologies for detecting WMD. Secretary Chertoff said the U.S. would welcome collaboration on both technological and operational issues in this area. Delon also mentioned the utility of developing contacts in the area of

cybercriminality. SGDN monitored the internet 24 hours a day for potential attacks, and would welcome collaboration with a U.S. counterpart. Secretary Chertoff said DHS was responsible for cybersecurity, DOJ for cybercriminality, and that he would be happy to help build a relationship with France in this area. Dennis Sequiera would be the DHS contact point.

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SGDN: AVIATION SECURITY

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¶11. (C) Secretary Chertoff began by emphasizing the importance of the No-Fly and Selectee system for U.S. aviation security, and described plans to move to toward a system of namechecks on a rolling basis before departure, which would help avoid the problem of mistaken boarding of passengers on our watchlists. More sharing of data would also lead to fewer mistakes, and would allow us to better understand how each other's systems worked. The Secretary noted with interest the new C/T legislation in France, which he believed gave the government the authority to collect PNR data on travelers. The U.S. would be pleased to share its experience in this area with the GOF.

¶12. (C) Delon noted that on PNR developing a system would take time: they were starting from scratch, and would no

doubt have a selective approach at first. They had no plans to establish a French No-Fly list. He said that France would continue to try to cooperate with the U.S., but that this was not an easy matter. They had long had concerns about the legality of No-Fly screening under French data privacy law, and had now concluded that they would have to submit this to the French Data Privacy Authority (CNIL) for approval. They were still preparing their case, and wanted to avoid a negative decision, which would be a "disaster." They did not feel they were in a position to move forward with Selectee EA implementation pending these consultations. The Secretary indicated that he understood these concerns, and was hoping for progress on the Selectee EA as soon as they were able.

¶13. (C) Delon noted that an additional complication came from the upcoming European Court of Justice decision which could potentially overturn the U.S./EU agreement on PNR data protection, on the grounds that the commission lacked competence to conclude such an agreement. They would be planning for this in the coming weeks. Perhaps another basis could be found for an EU-wide agreement; he did not expect a "catastrophe" in the event of a negative decision. Secretary Chertoff concurred that we would need to find a way to make the system work in the event of such a decision.

¶14. (SBU) In response to enquiries about possible changes in the U.S. No-Fly system, Secretary Chertoff emphasized that the No-Fly system would remain as a key element of U.S. aviation security. He noted a number of possible improvements. The U.S. was seeking to develop a trusted traveler system, to put additional information into watchlist records to reduce the numbers of false positives, and to check names on a rolling basis before planes took off. The latter idea drew particular interest from the French, who noted that Air France was interested in participating in the TSA Quick Query pilot test planned for next summer. Francis

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Delon concluded by praising the good working relationships SGDN and the Embassy and DGAC and TSA had established on aviation security.

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SGDN: CSI AND VWPP  
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¶15. (SBU) In closing, Secretary Chertoff brought two specific issues to the attention of the French. He noted the importance of improving supply chain security, and the success we had experienced with the Container Security Initiative, which was now operating in a number of countries, including France. We hoped to increase inspection rates. One remaining problem was the unresolved issue of A&T status for CSI inspectors stationed in French ports. Other European partners had resolved this issue, and the Secretary hoped that the French MFA would do so soon as well.

¶16. (SBU) Secretary Chertoff also mentioned France's non-compliance with U.S. standards for biometric passports. He hoped the French would be able to produce biometric

passports soon; this would eliminate the considerable problems caused by the increased French need for visas. He also noted U.S. concern over lost and stolen passports in France. We needed to be able to identify and track these, and this would be a consideration in the February review of France's eligibility for the VWP. Delon noted France's concern about these issues as well: one of the benefits of the new passports would be to provide additional security against fraudulent use. David Martinon of MOI noted that they did not expect that these would be available before May, and that the U.S. Embassy received reports on lost and stolen passports from the GOF daily. Michel Wachenheim mentioned flight crew visas, and wondered whether alternative ways of collecting fingerprint scans without a personal appearance might be considered. Secretary Chertoff indicated he was open to exploring new approaches to information collection

for visa processing.

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LUNCH WITH FRENCH OPINION-MAKERS  
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¶17. (SBU) The Ambassador hosted a luncheon January 24 for the Secretary with a number of key academics and think tank directors. Participants included Guillaume Parmentier of the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI), Nicole Bacharan of the Sciences Politiques faculty, Jean-Luc Marret of the Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS), Pascal Drouhaud of the ruling UMP political party, and National Assembly Deputy Alain Marsaud.

¶18. (SBU) The wide-ranging discussion focused on the war on terror and counter-terrorism cooperation. Deputy Marsaud described the French system as "more integrated" than the U.S., arguing that France in the 1960's broke down the "firewall" between intelligence activity and the justice system, with the result that French prosecutors have considerably more leeway to work with France's intelligence agencies. Secretary Chertoff and the French participants agreed that prisons are of particular concern in the recruitment and formation of extremists sympathetic to terrorist organizations, and a potential breeding ground for suicide bombers.

¶19. (SBU) On data privacy concerns, Parmentier argued that Americans are more accepting of privacy loss than Europeans. Secretary Chertoff noted that Europe seems particularly

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concerned re data bases, but Europeans are much more accepting than are Americans of the national ID card concept. A number of French participants (IFRI, FRS, UMP) emphasized that, while the French may be understanding of the difficult task of fighting terrorists (noting France's Algerian history), the French public wants to see a more contrite U.S. when mistakes in fact are made. Bacharan cited widespread concern among Europeans that the U.S. is not living up to its own strong rule of law principles, concerns which she claimed were undermining European support for U.S. counter-terrorism efforts.

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OTHER MEETINGS  
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¶20. (SBU) Secretary Chertoff also met with Pierre de Bousquet de Florian, Director of France's DST and several of his close collaborators on C/T issues. Embassy will provide additional details of the meeting via separate channels. Chertoff met with U.S and French journalists at a press roundtable, and fielded questions on current political events as well as U.S counterterrorism policy and the issue of France's inability to comply with U.S. requirements for biometric passports. He also met with Minister of the Interior Nicholas Sarkozy February 25. Embassy will report on this meeting septel.

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COMMENT  
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¶21. (SBU) Secretary Chertoff's meetings in Paris bolstered our ongoing dialogue with the GOF on C/T cooperation and emphasized our shared commitment to the fight against terrorism and extremist ideologies, while promoting cooperation on emerging issues such as avian flu. At the same time, the Secretary successfully delivered a message

that on aviation and maritime security, issues remain which the GOF must work to resolve. Both in bilateral meetings and with the press the Secretary highlighted the need for the GOF to quickly find a way to produce biometric passports in order to allow French travelers to avoid the delay and expense of getting a visa.

¶22. (SBU) This cable was cleared with Secretary Chertoff, s  
party.

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Stapleton